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**NEWS-LETTER**

VISIT TO AMERICA

**SUPPLEMENT**

CHRISTIANS IN POLITICS III

I REMEMBER when I lived in India the irritation with which residents of long standing in the country would greet the publication of a new book or a series of articles by somebody who had come to India for the cold weather season, visited a few big cities, asked a few questions of a few people and then thought himself equipped to generalize about the people and problems of a vast country. My instinct is to remark in a few sentences that the five weeks I have spent in the United States have been weeks of absorbing interest, filled with a great variety of experiences of places and people and overlaid with that abounding hospitality and friendship for which the people of the United States are deservedly famous throughout the world, and to refrain from further comment.

But although I can make no kind of claim to having reached a balanced and mature judgment about anything whatever in the United States, perhaps some of our readers may be interested in a purely personal account of what I have been doing, seeing and thinking.

I left England on November 6th in the *Queen Elizabeth* Travelling in her gives one the impression of being carried back in a dream to the London of 1938. Was bread ever this colour? And did the dingy carpets and curtains to which we are so accustomed look something like this when

they were new ? On time to the minute we docked in New York in the darkness just before dawn. I was soon on the train carrying me out to the Middle West, and arrived at the Conference of the United Council of Church Women just twenty minutes before I was to speak. With the audience rising and falling on a still unassuaged Atlantic surge, I talked as an English woman to American women about the mood and temper in which Britain had emerged from the war and the kind of things which were engrossing us, the political changes through which the country was passing, and the difficulties and opportunities which the Churches are meeting in an increasingly planned society. From then on I was bombarded with eager questions about Britain, particularly about the political situation.

The United Council of Church Women has gained itself a great reputation in its five years' existence. It is what the Americans call a " grass roots " organization, that is to say it was not created from above, but grew up from below by the coming together into a national organization of groups of Church women, in towns, cities or states.

These local councils had their own programmes of social and educational work. Many are women's departments of city or state councils of churches. One group in the West, for example, when all Japanese-born Americans were interned with great speed and considerable hardship after Pearl Harbour, secured the use of warehouses, took over the personal and household effects of many hundreds of interned citizens, storing them or selling them for cash and holding an account for each family against its return. This had to be done under police protection and was an act of considerable social courage. These local councils of Church women are now playing an important part in the huge organization of Church World Service under which over two million parcels have already been sent by American Christians to needy people in Europe. The Council has a vigorous social action committee with a range of work too wide to describe here.

If I may permit myself one general comment on this conference of over 2,000 women from all over the United

States, it would be upon the remarkable combination of femininity and feminism which was evident. At no meeting of British women, even in pre-war days, either within or outside the Churches, would there have been seen such a variety of gay hair styles and giddy hats as were to be seen at this conference, or greater feminine charm. On the other hand, never have I heard anywhere in Church circles utterances of such strongly feminist character. There are historical reasons for this duality. American men have always regarded their women folk as the objects for which they worked themselves to an early grave : they have liked and encouraged femininity. At the same time American women were less bound by social custom than their English counterparts and went out and found socially useful work to do. In proportion to the work they do, to their educational standards and to the indirect influence which they exert on national life, American women certainly hold few offices in public life and fewer in the Church. This is very keenly felt by thoughtful public-spirited women.

I might leap from this Conference to that of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, which I attended at the end of my visit. There were some 500 delegates from the main Protestant denominations in the United States, and was perhaps as good a means as one could hope to have of gaining an insight into the life of the Churches in America in a brief time. The journey from New York to Seattle (3,000 miles) where the Council met took four nights and three days by train. That there should be over so vast an area a Council of Churches which on a wide range of common concerns brings the denominations into working contact with each other is a very remarkable achievement. There seemed to me to be lively concern among American Churchmen about the divisions of Protestantism. Feelers are constantly being put out about the uniting of similar denominations. Two member Churches of the Council of Churches had formed an organic union since the previous biennial meeting. The Churches, too, consider that money spent on fostering co-operation is well spent. The State of Michigan, for example, has a

Council of Churches with a full-time staff of eleven persons, and carries on active work throughout the Churches, especially in religious education and in Christian family life.

The dominant characteristic of this meeting of the Federal Council of Churches was, I think, its interest in international affairs. There is a very marked contrast between the attitude of Christian people in Great Britain to UNO and the prevailing attitude in the Churches in America. The Churches in Great Britain flung themselves with great enthusiasm into the effort to gain public support for the League of Nations after the last war. Disappointment and disillusion in the failure of the League were so sharp that the Churches now tend to take a sober view of the possibilities of creating world peace through UNO. In America, on the other hand, hopes are very high. I heard many Americans make statements which seemed to load the responsibility for *everything* that had happened in Europe since 1919 on to the shoulders of the United States because of its non-participation in the League of Nations. "Up and down the country," said Bishop Oxnam, in his presidential address to the Federal Council, "preachers are in their pulpits declaring the necessity of the full co-operation of the United States in making UNO a success if world peace is to be achieved." The new president, Mr. Charles Taft, brother of the senator and son of the one-time President of the United States, will undoubtedly continue the policy of the maximum of Church support for American participation in UNO.

Whenever I spoke I found intense interest in British social experiments, in the fact that, for instance, we had not forgotten even at the height of the war the horrors of unemployment and had set our hands to a large programme of social security. At the same time there was expressed the fear that the British people might too easily turn in on themselves and say that with their economic position gravely impaired by the war and their power diminishing in many parts of the world, they could be better employed in tidying up their own island than in attempting to play a role in international affairs, which their position of power no longer

thrusts upon them. Many Americans are keenly aware that America is now the dominant economic power in the world and must exercise a responsibility for world affairs commensurate with this power. Some at least of them see in Great Britain resources of experience in statesmanship in world affairs which no other country possesses. We have, therefore, to discover how to make this experience available without patronage and without over-playing our hand, for there is still plenty of powerful anti-British feeling in the United States.

The rest of my time was spent not at conferences, but in travelling about the country and seeing all that I possibly could. The two things about which I was most anxious to learn were labour conditions and housing. I was immensely fortunate in being able to cross the continent from side to side. Nothing gives one so powerful an impression of the stupendous economic wealth of America as such a journey.

If the centre of a nation's government ought to be graced with lovely buildings, wide avenues, open spaces, museums, galleries and libraries, and kept clean by the banishment of all heavy industries, then Washington comes near to being all that the capital of a great country should be. Detroit and the other great centres of American economic power seem not to belong to the same world. The contrast between Washington and Detroit is perhaps symbolic. Economic power and political power stand over against each other : they are not interlocked as they are in this country, nor is there in America as I think there is here, an underlying assumption, political power is the only ultimate and legitimate form of power in a community. The struggle for economic power between employers and organized labour has a history of terrible violence. The attempt to break the unions by force was met by greater force. The unions have found the weapons which are effective in their fight—unyielding toughness in leadership and the sheer hard pressure of great masses. During the '30s Washington came in to redress the balance of power within industry and by a series of acts secured the position of the unions against the employers. Now Washington is entering upon

a second stage, that of defending the interests of consumers, and a spate of restrictive legislation on the activities of unions is expected when Congress meets in January. In one sense John L. Lewis has lost the first round, but he may have gained an important strategic advantage for the next round in having tempted the Government to take an action which brings the C.I.O. closer to the A.F. of L. than it has been for some time past. The word " injunction ", evoking as it does the memory of how in the past the unions were beaten to their knees by this method, is more than a red rag to a bull.

In this country we have the position that trade unions now are, or are at least a very large part of, the Government. The situation in the United States is totally different. Organized labour is on the whole not anxious to gain political power, and those who hoped to form a third party are now saying that there is little chance of bringing it about.

The battle royal between political and economic power, with prices rising as they are at present, seems bound to continue and intensify. Christians in America suffer as Christians in this country do from lack of economic education. Many are aware that Britain's fears of a violent upheaval in America's economic life are very far from groundless. Few, so far as I can judge, are asking whether insistence upon the necessity of achieving a stable economy is not itself America's greatest contribution to world peace.

It is clear that in local government also economic power has outstripped political power. The city of Detroit was a French trading settlement. Its spectacular growth has taken place during the last twenty years. We talk about mass society; here it is—mile upon mile of factories, spreading far beyond the city's boundaries, and interspersed with acres of houses, thousands of them shacks erected during the war, which nobody sees any hope of replacing. In these vast automobile works men of all nations and colours work on highly specialized processes, as the parts of a vast industrial machine. According to police estimates, one-third of the population of certain sections of Detroit

changes every year (the highest figure of change for any London borough is less than 3 per cent). The city contains some terrible slums. To make green spaces within its boundaries buildings will have to be pulled down and land purchased by the city council. Soot rains down upon the city in quantities which, although I wrote them down as the chairman of the Citizens' Housing Association gave them to me, I am now unable to believe! One adult in four owns a car. That sounds prodigious. Inverted these figures mean that three persons out of four have to use a public transport system of which the most backward borough in this country would be heartily ashamed. But only a million of the three million inhabitants of greater Detroit live within the city, and most of the industry has sprawled itself out over the surrounding counties, contributing nothing to the city's finances. Within the city boundaries is a Polish township, containing more Poles than post-war Warsaw, completely independent of the city's jurisdiction.

Detroit must be one of the wealthiest industrial cities in all the world. It has produced some of America's richest men. It is fantastic to think that the city council of such a city has a millstone of debt round its neck. It has had on the stocks for many years an ambitious replanning scheme and a vigorous association for awakening public interest, but without the political power it is almost impotent, and whether it can ever get political power unless further economic disaster gives the Federal Government the opportunity to step in and create a large municipal authority extending over the whole of the industrial area of greater Detroit, is a moot point.

Meanwhile, conditions of terrible overcrowding, pressure on schools, and the fear of competition between racial groups for particular kinds of work, give a feeling of the possibility of violence never far below the surface. In 1943 there were some horrible racial riots, mainly between Negroes and Poles, in Detroit, mostly over competition for housing. Little has happened to alleviate that situation or to allay the fear of more or even worse to come.

But for all that, Detroit is a place with civic pride. It has a fine river front. People are proud of its industrial achievements, of its part in the war, of its rapid growth and of some of its fine suburbs, and vigorous attempts are made to turn people's attention to the sort of city which Detroit might become if political responsibility can catch up on economic development.

I was glad to have seen something of several of the worlds that make up America. When I was in Seattle on the Pacific seaboard people said to me, " Have you been in the East ? " I had to think hastily, did they mean China or Japan, and then to remember suddenly that they meant New York. Seattle is the Portsmouth of the Pacific, and the whole seaboard looks westwards. I can well understand why Europe seems so far away and why people should be resentful that America should be dragged into European wars. It is another world. But the war has brought home the oneness of the world even to the Far West. Americans have taken a far straighter look at the atomic bomb than people in this country, and they see it as the writing on the wall for their nation committing them to active and full participation in world affairs.

I was asked on several occasions to give to Christian people in Britain the warm greetings of Christian people in America : I am glad to do so through the News-Letter, which had its share in the war years in building an understanding between Christians in the two countries. I was overwhelmed by kindness—and it was given to me *because* I was British.

Kathleen Bliss

# CHRISTIANS IN POLITICS

## III—THE TEMPTATIONS OF A POLITICIAN

THE problems of political as contrasted with personal morality have received comparatively little attention from Christian thinkers. Few attempts have been made, as Lord Pakenham pointed out in an article in the *Political Quarterly*[1] on "Grey Eminence and Political Morality", to articulate a code of conduct for the man engaged in politics which show sufficient understanding of the conditions under which he works. While denying flatly the thesis of Aldous Huxley that the man of virtue has no place at the centre of government, he recognized that the politician has peculiar moral difficulties.

Success in politics, Lord Pakenham suggests, appears to depend on three lines of conduct which do not readily square with the Christian conception of life. First, the successful politician has to persuade his fellows of the superiority not only of his views, but of his personality to that of others competing for their support. Secondly, he has sometimes to collaborate with others in supporting and recommending policies which he may dislike or even seriously disagree with. Both these tasks involve a suppression and distortion of his viewpoint and personality for the sake of popularity and harmony that are distasteful to a man of integrity. Thirdly, the politician may at times have to coerce large numbers of his fellows into doing things they object to. This may bring about a war-like atmosphere bringing in its train the moral perils of war.

No other profession is faced with such difficulties to a comparable degree. Yet, instead of making clear to themselves and to others the nature of the circumstances in which they have to work and formulating a code of conduct to meet them, politicians have usually paraded themselves before the public as practitioners of a higher code of conduct than that of ordinary people. A politician who admitted, as any business man would, that he had his own interest to consider as well as that of the state, would be dismissed as an embarrassing cynic. This

[1] October-December, 1942.

combination of exaggerated claims to virtue with practice which often appears worse than that of ordinary professional or commercial relationships produces a tendency to despair of all forms of government, which has done much to undermine and threaten democracy in recent years. Official biographers of statesmen have much to answer for in maintaining the pretence that their heroes never found it necessary to deviate in public life from the gentlemanly standards of private life. Even the saintliness of statesmen cannot afford to neglect selfish considerations in reaching a decision of moment, for he will know full well that his whole political future may be jeopardized if he miscalculates the public reaction—if, for instance, he proposes conscription six months too early or opposes it six months too late.

Lord Pakenham's conclusion is that not worse but better men are needed in politics, who enter it with their eyes open to its moral difficulties and who are prepared to be more candid about what they are compelled to do. He pleads for an attempt to harmonize the three-pronged technique imposed upon the politician from the nature of his craft with the unchangeable truths of the Christian ethic.

**MORALITY AND POLITICS**

If moral judgments are to be passed on political action, it is necessary to be clear about the nature of that action. Politics is concerned with the achievement of practical ends. In achieving his purposes the politician is, like every craftsman, limited by the nature of the material with which he has to work. The recent contribution of the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce to the subject of the relations of morality and politics [1] is illuminating at many points. No one can lay down his book without a deepened sense of the moral significance of human life. Politics is for Croce the sphere in which man's moral nature can find its largest and richest fulfilment. Yet he sees with equal clearness that politics has its own distinct sphere, governed by its own laws, which cannot be over-ridden by moral maxims.

"The initial situation," he insists, "is given in each case; the men with whom we have to deal are always what they are; their ideas, their prejudices, their good or bad dispositions, their virtues and their defects furnish the material on which and with

[1] *Politics and Morals.* Allen and Unwin, 8s. 6d.

which we must work, and there is no way of substituting for them more pleasing material." If in order to agree with men in a common action or to induce them to come to an agreement, it is necessary to soothe their illusions, flatter their vanity, appeal to their superstitions or childish beliefs or their most superficial ideas, these means may have to be adopted to achieve the desired end.

The politician in the exercise of his responsibilities is a moral person, and according to his moral stature and moral insight he will, among the choices open to him, prefer one course of action to another. But he cannot lift himself out of the conditions in which he has to act. For this reason, as Croce rightly maintains, we have to distinguish between a moral and a " moralistic " view of history and judgment of political action. We cannot apply to political decisions copy-book maxims which leave out of account the infinite complexity of the factors which govern concrete action. A truly moral judgment of political action seeks to understand the whole historical situation in which it takes place and asks whether the statesman in making his decision has responded adequately and at the highest level open to him to the demands and necessities of the total situation confronting him. The famous slogan of the militant Nonconformist Conscience that " what is morally wrong can never be politically right " was fully justified in insisting that no sphere of human life is outside the control of moral obligation but gravely misleading in its too simple and inelastic understanding of moral behaviour in politics.

What is possible in politics depends more on the general state of society in which the politician has to function than upon the politician himself. In a deeper sense than is often acknowledged, a society gets the politicians it deserves. It is largely a waste of time for the public to blame " the politicians " as a class for the ills of society. The public would be more profitably employed in improving the moral temper of society itself, starting with themselves, for in a society of moral men those who govern will find it much easier to retain their moral integrity than in one which is corrupt.

## TEMPTATIONS PECULIAR TO POLITICS

It is in the light of such considerations that the difficulties instanced by Lord Pakenham have to be considered.

In regard to the first difficulty of self-advertisement, every one who seeks a post or applies for an office has to submit his qualifications. The peculiarity of the political problem is that the body which adjudicates is not a committee of experts examining credentials in private, but a wide electorate that has to be wooed by methods of publicity. The difficulty is mitigated to some extent by the fact that it is the policy of the party rather than the merits of the particular candidate for which the electors are asked to vote. But it is natural that the advocacy of party aims should be re-enforced by insistence on the ability of the local candidate to contribute to their realization, and it need occasion no surprise if his virtues in the eyes of his more ardent supporters at times appear greater than a strictly impartial assessment would warrant. Up to a point there is nothing in all this that is not part of the ordinary rough and tumble of life, and only the over-scrupulous are likely to be troubled by it. Questions of conscience arise only when claims are made that are misleading or dishonest, or when unfair insinuations are made in regard to an opponent. It is sometimes said after an election that it has been a clean fight, and it ought to be the concern of Christians who engage in political warfare to do everything in their power to keep the fighting clean. But so long as their desire and intention to do this is manifest, those who take part in the hurly-burly of public life are certainly not serving God less worthily than those who cultivate " a fugitive and cloistered virtue " and excuse themselves from the struggle on the ground that politics is a dirty business.

The second difficulty is, in one sense, not peculiar to politicians. It arises wherever individuals have to co-operate with others. In all collective decisions the individual has to subordinate his personal view or preference to that of the majority. In many instances the view of the majority may be sounder than his own, and to acknowledge the larger wisdom of the common mind may be a proper act of Christian humility. The problem in the case of the politician is that it may be necessary for him, not merely to acquiesce in, but publicly to advocate policies and decisions contrary to those which he himself favours.

By no means all disagreements are about questions of conscience. Many differences relate to matters of judgment. In

regard to these there can be no moral objection that, when a decision has been reached by the party or by the responsible minister, members of the party should defend the course that has been adopted and state the reasons which led to its adoption, even though they may originally have opposed it. When party policy in regard to a particular issue is at variance with the strongly held convictions of an individual, or of a group within the party, the question how far he and they will press their opposition has to be decided by the importance which they attach to that particular issue in comparison with the general aims of the party. It may be claimed that in regard to such matters a relatively high code of conduct has been achieved in British public life. The not infrequent resignation of ministers on questions of principle, the occasional taking off of the party whips in debates on such matters as Sunday entertainments, in which codes of personal morality are widely divergent, and the deference commonly paid to moral and religious scruples are all evidences of a recognition of the rights of conscience in public affairs. But there can be no grounds for complacency. There can be no question that, if the Christian conscience were more alive and better educated, conflicts would arise more frequently and be felt more acutely than at present.

Lord Pakenham's third difficulty relates to coercion. Coercion as a last resort belongs to the nature of politics ; it is inherent in the task of government. But the exercise of coercion raises in an acute form all the problems relating to the use of power. The temptations attaching to the possession of power are increased in modern society by the immense expansion of power as a result of technical inventions and its concentration in the hands of relatively few individuals.

Apart from the temptations peculiar to his calling, the politician is also liable to personal temptations which beset men in other walks of life. Covetousness, peculation, envy, pride of office or of power, disloyalty or breach of confidence for the sake of personal advantage, are sins as common as they are deadly, and the Christian will not deceive himself that he needs no reminder of their dangers. But there are also subtler temptations. The politician, and in particular the Member of Parliament, is expected to be knowledgeable about and to have views upon so many

subjects that, in self-defence, he has to become expert in the art of "bluffing". He has to make so many speeches and to give so many quick rejoinders that he is in constant danger of becoming glib and superficial. On the other hand, the public whom he must convince is so often ill-informed and, especially if he is a Minister of State, he has so many facilities for obtaining inside information that, unless he maintains the highest standards of truthfulness and public responsibility, he can be very easily tempted to mislead his hearers. He is constantly in the public eye and has to deal with grave and weighty matters and, once he is assured of his position, receives every encouragement to become self-important and pompous.

The politician in relation to his constituency has continually to choose between adopting the line which promises immediate results and presenting the truth as he sees it; that is to say between corrupting or educating the judgment of those whom he is addressing. He has difficult decisions to make about election pledges. He is often exposed to severe tests in dealing with organized pressure groups. He has to deal with endless practicalities and to maintain an unceasing struggle with opposition and thus is tempted to become philistine and hard-boiled, finding less time even than the rest of men in this busy world to cultivate his mind and to say his prayers.

There is, however, another side to the picture. The politician has also many opportunities and privileges. He is thrown up against all sorts and conditions of men, and these contacts can broaden and deepen his understanding of human nature and thus enlarge his humanity. The House of Commons, besides being said to be the best club, is in some ways also the best university in the world. The blaze of publicity in which the politician works has its perils and irritations, but it is, at least, a powerful deterrent against falling into laziness or gross dishonesty. As he grows in responsibility and experience he will probably find himself shedding foolish snobberies and prejudices and, if he is something of an intellectual, will be disciplined out of taking refuge from real situations behind vague abstractions. Above all, he occupies a position of public trust and has exceptional opportunities of doing solid good on behalf of his fellow-men.

## THE NAKED STRUGGLE FOR POWER

We have directed our attention in this paper to the temptations of political life as we know it in this country, where there exists a broad measure of agreement about fundamental constitutional questions. The main political parties are content to abide by the decision of the electorate and, when they are defeated, to have recourse only to constitutional means of regaining power. The political struggle becomes much more acute where a party is bent on overthrowing the established constitution and creating a type of society fundamentally different from that which exists. Where men are prepared to sacrifice their lives rather than submit to a social order which they dislike, there exists a state of virtual civil war. In times of revolution, political leaders are faced with more terrible choices than those which present themselves in more settled periods. The price of success in the cause to which they are committed may be the ruthless suppression of opponents.

Similarly, the statesman who has to bear the awful responsibility of deciding whether to allow his country to be involved in war with other states, knows that if he chooses war he is opening the floodgates to all kinds of horrors, cruelties and deceptions. Even in the period of tension which precedes the actual outbreak of war many actions may seem necessary as a means of averting war, or of assuring the safety of his nation, that would not be even contemplated in times of greater security.

Into the more difficult ethical questions that arise in such circumstances we cannot enter in this paper. But we believe that the moral problems, while intensified to a point at which they become almost unbearable, are not different in character from those that have been discussed here. The relations between morality and politics remain substantially the same.

## WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES CHRISTIANITY MAKE?

The statesman or politician who is also a Christian will, in the majority of decisions which he has to take, probably not act differently from one who makes no Christian profession. Nevertheless, however much he may be limited by the circumstances in which he has to act and by the public opinion which he represents and to which he is responsible, there should always be present in his mind three considerations which may at critical points profoundly influence what he decides to do.

First, he will be aware of the corrupting power of unconscious bias. He will realize how easy it is for national or class self-interest to masquerade under the guise of high-sounding principle or to twist the principle in its application, and he will be ceaselessly vigilant to make the effort of intellectual and spiritual self-examination necessary to ensure that he himself is not being misled.

In the second place, he will never be without a consciousness of the fallibility of his own judgment as a sinful man nor of the limitations of his foresight as a finite being. He will shrink, for example, from so black a deed as to launch a preventive war with weapons which involve the wholesale destruction of civilian populations, because he will be reluctant to regard as infallible the judgment that it is the only possible means of preserving the life of his nation. He will hesitate to take on his own shoulders a burden of responsibility that belongs to God alone.

But equally he will not recoil from difficult and costly decisions. He will resist the moral squeamishness which is unable to make a decision because of the gravity of the consequences. He knows that he has been placed where he is to act responsibly, and that after he has done his utmost to discover what is right, he has to put his conclusions fearlessly to the test of action, trusting the consequences to God and putting his hope in God's mercy and forgiveness. The man on whose decisions the lives and welfare of millions may depend cannot but know in experience more deeply than other men, that the only thing which makes it possible to act responsibly and unfalteringly in a world in which the consequences of our actions are hidden from us, and may turn out to be quite other than we intended, is a firm belief in the forgiving mercy and over-ruling providence of God.

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